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CAMEROON

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I. LAND AND PEOPLE

A. The land

1. Cameroon is located in the heart of Africa. It is triangular in shape, stretching about 1,200 km to the north from a base 800 km wide, and covers an area of 475,442 km^2. It is located between 2° and 13° north and between 8° and 16° east. It is bordered to the south by Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo, to the east by the Central African Republic, to the north-east by Chad, to the west by Nigeria, and to the south-west by 400 km of Atlantic coastline.

B. Natural environment

2. Cameroon is characterized by a great diversity of the natural environments found in different parts of Africa. This feature has earned it the sobriquet "Africa in miniature". Three main bioclimatic areas can be distinguished:

(a) The first is the equatorial zone, which has two variations:

(i) An area with the classic equatorial climate, with four seasons, rainfall of over 1,500 mm and an average temperature of 25° C, with a variation of 2° C. This is an area of ferriferous soil and evergreen forest that is increasingly being encroached upon by man. This plateau region has an average altitude of 700 m and its northern fringe is covered by a patchwork of forests and savannahs;

(ii) An area with an equatorial monsoon climate, with a coastal variant and a subtropical mountain variant. The region is crossed from south to north-east by the Cameroonian ridge, with an average height of 1,400 m. The latter stretches from Bonny Bay, overlooked by Mount Cameroon (4,095 m), to the Adamaoua region. The monsoon climate is characterized here by an average temperature of 22° C, two climatic seasons and an average annual rainfall of 2,000 mm. This heavy rainfall sustains a green forest which gives way in the north-east, where it has been badly eaten away, to vast grasslands known as "grassfields". The soil is predominantly ferriferous and volcanic;

(b) The second is the tropical humid zone, located between 4° and 10° north, where between 900 and 1,500 mm of rainfall is recorded annually. The average temperature is 28 °C, with a variation of 6° C. With its humid tropical, or "Sudanese", climate, this area is one of large savannahs where trees and shrubs grow, and is suitable for raising livestock. The savannahs cover a variety of soils, with scattered ferriferous or ferruginous concretions and volcanic soils. The Benoue basin, at an average height of 200 m above sea level, is flanked by two highland areas, in the form of the high Adamaoua plateaux, Cameroon's "water tower", lying on either side of the seventh parallel, and the Mandara Mountains above the ninth parallel, which are a natural tourist attraction;

(c) The third is the arid tropical zone, located between 10° and 13° north, with a Sudanese-Sahelian continental climate characterized by between 300 and 900 mm of annual rainfall and an average temperature of 28° C, with a variation of 7° C.

3 On the plains, vegetation is sparse, usually in the form of prickly bushes, although there is a flood plain with hydromorphic soil known as yaere, which lies at the foot of the Mandara Mountains, between the "duck's beak" and Lake Chad. The harsh climate recalls the Sahelian and desert climate of Sudanese Africa.

4 Cameroon's drainage system consists of four large river basins:

(a) The Atlantic basin, where the largest rivers flow from the high Adamaoua plateaux, the southern Cameroonian plateau and the high plateaux in the west towards the ocean, including the Sanaga (920 km long), Nyong (750 km), Ntem (460 km), Wouri and Mungo rivers;

(b) The Congo basin, drained by the Kadei and Ngoko rivers, which feed into the Sangha, a tributary of the Congo River;

(c) The Niger River basin, drained by the 350-km-long Bénoué River;

(d) The Lake Chad basin, drained by the Chari and Logone rivers.

5. Four hydrological systems can also be identified:

(a) The classic equatorial system, with high water levels during both the heavy and the light rainy seasons;

(b) The Cameroonian system, with high water levels between March and October - the highest being in September - and low levels between November and March;

(c) The tropical system, characterized by strongly contrasting water flows in different seasons: in the dry season, the beds of most rivers are dry (they are known as mayo in the local language);

(d) The mixed system of the Sanaga River basin, which straddles the tropical and equatorial zones.

C. Population

1. Ethnic and demographic features

6. The Cameroonian people today comprises 230 tribes, divided into three cultural groups: the Bantu, in the South, Littoral, South-West, Centre and South-East provinces; the Bantoid or semi-Bantu, in the West and North-West provinces; and the Sudanese, in the Adamaoua, North and Far North provinces. The Pygmy population, which is not included in these large groups, lives in the South, East and Centre provinces.

7. Far from being a source of conflict and an obstacle to coexistence, this ethnic diversity is viewed by the authorities and the populations as a source of mutual enrichment, with the clearly understood and commonly accepted objective of using it as the foundation of a genuine nation where peace, understanding and justice prevail and in which each citizen should feel at home everywhere.

8. Attaining this objective means eliminating all forms of discrimination, a goal that the Government pursues by means of the following programmes: national integration; balanced regional development; the equitable sharing of the fruits of growth; democratization and liberalization; the protection of minorities and underprivileged groups; and good governance.

2. Socio-economic and cultural indicators

9. According to the Statistical Yearbook of Cameroon (August 1998 edition), Cameroon has about 14,297,617 inhabitants, with an annual growth rate of 2.8 per cent and a population density of 30.7 inhabitants per km^2. There are approximately 4 million foreigners from countries

throughout the world living peacefully alongside the national population. According to a 1998 report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are some 47,057 refugees living in Cameroon, including 6,007 receiving assistance from UNHCR.

3. Structure

10. A breakdown of the population by sex and age reveals the following:

(a) The population is relatively young, with an estimated 45 per cent below the age of 15, 51.8 per cent aged between 16 and 64 and 3.2 per cent aged 64 or over;

(b) The population is largely rural: statistics on place of residence show that 6,748,475 people live in cities while 7,549,142 live in rural areas. However, the exodus from the countryside has been picking up pace, thanks partly to the "urban phenomenon";

(c) The ratio of men to women is 49 to 51.

11. One can observe an unequal territorial distribution of the population and some large migratory movements as a result of population growth and unequal development between the regions. For this reason, population density varies from one region to another, from less than 10 inhabitants per km^2 in the East province to over 200 inhabitants per km^2 in the West province.

12. Life expectancy at birth is 59 years for women and 54.5 years for men.

4. Religion

13. The population includes 2,600,000 Catholics, 2,586,000 Muslims and 1,900,000 Protestants. However, it should be pointed out that the people of Cameroon not only follow these world religions but also remain attached to their ancestral religions.

5. Economic data

14. Cattle-raising is an important activity. The agricultural sector employs 73.8 per cent of the active population and provides around 21 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The secondary sector is expanding: it employs 6.3 per cent of the active population and contributes 34 per cent of GDP.

15. The Cameroonian economy enjoyed a growth spurt between 1960 and 1983, putting the country in the leading group of high-growth countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in the category of average-income countries. The growth rate, once as high as 8 per cent in real terms, has fallen considerably since 1986, and has sometimes been negative. However, towards the end of 1997, there were some hopeful signs of growth.

16. The socio-economic indicators are as follows:

- Per capita income: approximately US$ 650 (source: "Quelques indicateurs économiques des pays africains", United Nations/World Bank, 1995);
- Gross domestic product: CFAF 4,932.2 billion (source: DSCN/CTS);
- Inflation rate: approximately 2 per cent (1998);
- External debt: CFAF 4,246.9 billion (source: "Administration économique et financière du Cameroun", International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bank of the Central African States (BEAC));
- Unemployment rate: 30 per cent of the total active population. Unemployment strikes those in the 15 to 24-years age group particularly hard;
- Mother tongues: approximately 230;
- Infant mortality rate: 81 per 1,000 (source: Statistical Yearbook of Cameroon);
- Maternal mortality rate: 547 per 100,000 live births, with rates as high as 900 in the north as a whole (source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF));
- Fertility rate: 16.6 per 1,000 in 1992/93;
- Average births per childbearing woman: 5.4;
- Birth rate: 39.3 per 1,000 (1992);
- Crude death rate: 13.7 per 1,000 (source: Statistical Yearbook of Cameroon).

II. GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE

A. Legal system

17. French and British colonial rule left Cameroon with a dual legal system, which has elements of the Napoleonic Code and common law. This duality is further complicated by the coexistence of customary and statutory law.

B. Political system

18. Cameroon acquired national sovereignty in 1960. West and East Cameroon were reunited on 1 October 1961. Following the referendum of 20 May 1972, Cameroon became a unitary State. Under the 18 January 1996 Constitution, Cameroon is a unitary, decentralized and democratic State with a semi-presidential regime. The executive, legislative and judicial branches are separate.

19. Cameroon was a de facto one-party State from 1966 to 1990, when Act No. 90/56 of 19 December 1990 concerning political parties was adopted. Five elections have been held since that change:

(a) In 1992, 5 political parties took part in the presidential election and 32 in the legislative elections;

(b) In January 1996, 36 political parties took part in municipal elections: town councillors were elected from 15 of them and many town halls are administered by opposition parties;

(c) In May and August 1997, 44 political parties took part in the legislative elections: the present legislature consists of deputies from 7 political groupings;

(d) In October 1997, nine parties each presented a candidate in the presidential election.

1. The executive

20. The President of the Republic is the head of State. Elected by the whole nation, he is the symbol of national unity, defines national policy, safeguards the Constitution and oversees the smooth running of government bodies. He is also the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity, the permanence and continuity of the State and compliance with international treaties and agreements (art. 5 of the Constitution). The President is elected by direct, fair and secret universal suffrage by a simple majority for a seven-year term renewable once.

21. The Prime Minister is the head of Government and is in charge of its programme. The Government is responsible for implementing the national policy defined by the President (art. 11) and is appointed by the President.

2. The legislature

22. Legislative power is held by Parliament, which consists of two houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. Parliament legislates and monitors government action (art. 14). The National Assembly consists of 180 deputies elected by direct and secret universal suffrage for a five-year term. The Senate, which has not yet actually been set up, represents the decentralized regional authorities. It consists of 100 members, 70 of whom are elected by regionally-based indirect universal suffrage and 30 of whom are appointed by the President.

3. The judiciary

23. Under article 37 of the Constitution, justice is administered in the territory of the Republic in the name of the Cameroonian people. Judicial power is held by the Supreme Court, the courts of appeal and the courts. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature.

4. The Constitutional Council

24. The Constitutional Council is responsible for constitutional matters. It rules on the constitutionality of laws and is the regulatory body overseeing the operation of institutions (art. 47). Pending the establishment of this body, the Supreme Court carries out its duties.

5. The Parliamentary Court of Justice

25. The Parliamentary Court of Justice is competent to judge acts carried out in the course of their duties by the President, in cases of high treason, and by the Prime Minister, other members of the Government and other top government officials to whom power has been delegated, in cases affecting State security.

6. The Economic and Social Council

26. An economic and social council, whose membership, remit and structure are laid down by law (art. 54), has been established.

C. The administrative system

27. Three basic administrative models exist side by side: centralization, devolution and decentralization.

1. Centralized administration

28. This is made up of all the services housed in the political capital, the headquarters of the institutions, with responsibility for the whole of the territory. It includes the offices of the President and Prime Minister, the core services of the ministries, and technical and advisory institutions.

2. Devolved administration

29. This consists of bodies with authority in a given area, but which are accountable to central government. The administrative divisions are as follows:

- Provinces, of which Cameroon has 10, each headed by a governor;
- Departments, headed by prefects (58 in all);
- Arrondissements, under the authority of sub-prefects (269 in all); and, lastly,
- Districts, under the authority of district heads (53 in all).

3. Decentralized administration

30. Article 55 of the Constitution stipulates that the decentralized regional authorities are regions and communes. The above-mentioned provinces will become regions when this change

is put into effect. The decentralized regional authorities are legal persons under public law, they enjoy administrative and financial autonomy in the management of regional and local affairs and they are run freely by elected councils under the terms laid down by the law. Technically speaking, decentralization is also implemented in Cameroon through numerous administrative, industrial and commercial State corporations, as well as through a variety of parastatal enterprises active in various sectors of the economic and social life of the country.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

31. Cameroon has ratified numerous international human rights conventions or covenants and their additional protocols and has also acceded to other supranational legal instruments, including:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) (ratified on 7 June 1960);

The ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) (ratified on 3 September 1962);

The ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) (ratified on 7 June 1960);

The ILO Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) (ratified on 3 September 1962);

The ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) (ratified on 15 May 1970);

The ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) (ratified on 15 May 1988);

The ILO Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973 (No. 138) (ratified on 14 April 1998);

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified on 24 June 1971);

The Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ratified by Decree No. 97/079 of 25 April 1997);

The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ratified on 1 November 1976);

The Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (acceded to on 6 October 1972);

The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (ratified by State succession on 23 June 1961);

The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery;

The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others;

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified on 23 August 1994);

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed on 27 September 1990 and ratified on 11 January 1993);

The Protocol amending the Slavery Convention signed at Geneva on 25 September 1926;

The Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (ratified on 19 September 1967);

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol (ratified on 27 June 1984);

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified on 27 June 1984).

It should be noted that Act No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996 amending the Constitution vested human rights with genuine constitutional status by incorporating into its preamble certain provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

32. The judicial and administrative authorities with jurisdiction affecting human rights are the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which has specific responsibility for civil liberties, and the Ministry of Justice. Under the Constitution, the justice system has become a genuine judiciary.

33. Anyone whose rights have been violated may take the matter to the courts dealing with statute law (courts of first instance or regional courts) or to courts dealing with traditional law (customary-law courts or trial courts). They may also petition the National Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms, which will be discussed further below, and international human rights bodies once domestic remedies have been exhausted. The injured person may, where necessary, seek compensation for the injury suffered and obtain damages through the courts.

Under the law as it stands, if a person is discharged or acquitted or has been wrongfully held in custody, that person cannot be compensated unless he or she can prove that the judge was at fault or the service did not function properly. However, compensation is provided for in such circumstances in the preliminary draft Code of Penal Procedure. Moreover, articles 443-447 of the Code of Criminal Investigation provide, in cases of judicial review, for compensation for the victims of judicial errors. Meanwhile, statutory rehabilitation is provided for in articles 69-72 of the Penal Code and in articles 624-633 of the Code of Criminal Investigation.

34. Human rights instruments are incorporated into domestic law by means of ratification. Pursuant to article 43 of the Constitution, the President negotiates and ratifies international treaties and agreements. Those which concern the law are submitted for approval by Parliament, through legislation, prior to ratification. In conformity with article 45 of the Constitution, international treaties or agreements which have been ratified take precedence, as soon as they have been published, over the law. They may then be invoked before the courts or administrative bodies. However, in order for criminal provisions to be applicable, they must be supplemented in the national legislation by appropriate penalties. Thus, Act No. 97/009 of 10 January 1997 incorporated the offence of torture into the Cameroonian Penal Code by laying down penalties for such criminal actions.

35. The National Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms was set up by Decree No. 90/1459 of 8 November 1990, and has legal personality. Numerous private charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supplement and further its work. These NGOs are governed by Act No. 99/014 of 22 December 1999, and the Ministry of Social Affairs is setting up an NGO register.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

36. Cameroon has an official gazette in which all legislative acts, administrative measures and regulations are published. The media regularly inform the people about their rights. There is a project to set up rural radio stations whose programmes will be able to reach every sector of society. Human rights workshops are held regularly for both human rights officials and the general public. Some Cameroonians are planning to translate the national or supranational human rights instruments into local languages. Lastly, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the celebrations were inaugurated by the Prime Minister in person on 16 June 1998 and human rights experts were dispatched to the provinces to raise people's awareness of their fundamental rights.

37. However, it is unfortunate that the intended information and publicity activities were limited because of illiteracy in some population groups and the inaccessibility of some areas.